



# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **‘PROJECT SEARCH’ STUDENTS GRADUATE WITH NEW JOB SKILLS**

*Student clients gain job skills, independence*

**(RICHMOND, Va.)** — Nearly 80 students who participated this school year in an innovative workforce and career development program that helps Virginia youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities learn about the workplace are graduating with new job and interpersonal skills.

Project SEARCH provides high school students with disabilities with internship opportunities to gain work experience and develop skills that will lead to future employment. Students participate in the hands-on training program during their senior year of high school by working in a healthcare or business setting, with the goal of gaining employment by the end of the school year. Graduations for this year’s class of Project SEARCH participants kick off May 16 in Christiansburg at the Carilion New River Valley Medical Center.

The youth participated at 10 host sites across the Commonwealth in Project SEARCH, a program coordinated by the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services, the Virginia Department of Education and local public schools systems. In past years, some host sites have offered jobs to the interns at their graduation ceremony. This year, more than a quarter of the participating students are already employed.

“This unique program gives young people invaluable opportunities to gain independence and learn job skills in a supportive environment,” said DRS Commissioner Jim Rothrock. “Time and time again, I hear how Project SEARCH transforms lives in a positive way, and how it also transforms their coworkers as they witness the enthusiasm and commitment of these students.”

Throughout the school year, DRS counselors shepherd their young clients through the program, working with teachers from the students' local school divisions as well as job coaches from local employment service organizations. These partners work each day with participating students to help them learn the professional, interpersonal and independent living skills that will aid them in their path to potential employment. Students might work in food service or materials handling while they learn skills that can transfer to other jobs and enhance their independence.

[Project SEARCH](#), a national program dedicated to providing education and training to young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, began in Virginia in 2005. DRS provided more than \$500,000 to fund job coaches to work with the participants through the academic year to ensure that they learn the responsibilities and duties of the workplace.

This year's other host sites and graduation dates are: Clinch Valley Medical Center, Richlands, May 23; Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, Roanoke, June 1; Bon Secours St. Francis Medical Center, Midlothian, June 4; Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, Richmond, June 5; Sentara Norfolk General Hospital, June 5; Virginia Commonwealth University Health System, Richmond, June 6; Prince William Hospital, Manassas, June 7; Sentara Careplex Hospital, Hampton, June 14; and Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center, June 14.

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The Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services provides and advocates for the highest quality of services to help persons with disabilities maximize their employment, independence, and full inclusion into society. Through its four regional offices, 35 field offices, and various partnerships within the private and public sector, DRS assists more than 30,000 consumers annually with services including vocational counseling, career exploration, training, assistive technology and other specialized programs that cater to individual needs. For more information, visit [www.vadrs.org](http://www.vadrs.org).